

# ICONIC

Images of the Floating World

RONIN GALLERY







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The Largest Collection of Japanese Prints in the U.S.  
Japanese and East Asian Contemporary Art

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# Immortal Images

In the history of art, certain works are universally recognizable, from museum walls to emojis, these designs blur the line between life and art. For these works, the term *iconic* speaks to an immortality, an undimming radiance that crosses temporal and geographic barriers. From the Greek *eikon* meaning “image” or “likeness,” *icon* originally referred to religious portraits that serve as intermediaries between the devotee and the divine. In the realm of art history, the works crowned with the term *iconic* serve as intercessors between the contemporary viewer and a moment in time, an art medium, or an innovation. While the image itself stays the same, its interpretation transforms as its likeness traverses cultures and centuries. The work becomes an interwoven reflection of the artist and culture that created it and the audiences who have interpreted it over the years. Thus, a truly iconic image is not unchanging, but dynamic: ever shifting with cultural context, retaining visual resonance long past its original audience. But who are these arbiters of interpretation?

In the realm of ukiyo-e, an iconic work arises at the convergence of artistic inspiration and education. Looking first to artistic inspiration, the spark of an iconic design ignites with its interpretation by artistic peers, intensifies at the hand of international artists, and endures in the lexicon of contemporary artists. Such designs mark pivot points—new techniques, new ways of seeing—that inspire generations of creators to come. One example is Hokusai’s *Great Wave*, the most recognizable woodblock print design from the floating world. In the 1830s, Hokusai enchanted audiences with his interpretation of the Japanese landscape. His sensitivity to the natural world, dynamic composition, and incorporation of Prussian blue shaped the landscape genre. In 1890, when the *Great Wave* was featured in Siegfried Bing’s exhibition of Japanese prints in Paris, the work became the defining masterpiece not only of *Thirty-six Views of Fuji*, but of the landscape genre as well.<sup>1</sup> As it echoed across the prose of Edmond de Goncourt, the music of Debussy’s *La Mer*, and inspired the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, the wave swelled beyond the series, beyond the artist, to crest as a representative work of ukiyo-e in the Western imagination. Today, artists continue to draw inspiration from the image. In *Slash with a Knife* (1999), Yoshitomo Nara carries out a “punk attack on ukiyo-e.”<sup>2</sup> In 2017, Richard Allen received the V&A Illustration Prize for his use of Hokusai’s imagery to comment upon American immigration policy. From iconoclasm to visual shorthand, Hokusai’s wave continues its reverberation across visual art.

While artistic inspiration shapes an icon, art historians ingrain this assessment through education. Which works are chosen to represent a culture? A medium? A period? The selection of these representative works and their reinforcement through myriad syllabi and lectures, exhibitions

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1. Timothy Clark, *Hokusai’s Great Wave* (London: The British Museum Press, 2011), 51.

2. Ibid, 60.



and effusive captions, transforms certain images into paragons of history. These works become mile markers, standing for whole genres, art forms, and cultures. As this critical appraisal converges with artistic inspiration, the works at this meeting begin to function as icons. No longer do they require a background in art history, for their image has been seared into our cultural conscience as they pass seamlessly between museum and advertisement, classroom and city street. Thus, while many may be unable to title *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* or call to mind the name “Hokusai,” the curling, white-tipped crests are familiar, echoing from murals in London to postage stamps in Japan.

Given their subjective selection, such icons cannot be detached from cultural context. The judgement and re-use of images is far from neutral. In the United States, the study of ukiyo-e is inextricably linked to the imagination of 19th-century American and European artists that found inspiration from and the collectors that formed the early collections of ukiyo-e. The legacy of these choices shapes not only how we view Japanese art, but also how we envision Japan today. It’s tempting to conflate masterpiece and iconic work—particularly because many iconic works are *masterpieces*—but there are many wonderful works left underappreciated in the shadow cast by the iconic. Thus, if we look to the definition of *iconic*—“designating a person or thing regarded as representative of a culture or movement”—we must acknowledge the subjectivity at play. If Van Gogh had copied *Great Bridge at Senju* instead of *Sudden Shower at Ohashi Bridge and Atake*, would it be the former printed onto scarves and notebooks in museum gift shops?

According to Google, since 2001 the use of the word *iconic* has proliferated across press releases, advertisements, reviews, and more.<sup>3</sup> In the 2014 article, “Designers, Stop Calling Your Work Iconic,” the author runs through a list of so-called *iconic* products, ranging from soap bottles to hammocks, with palpable frustration. In “Why There’s No Such Thing as an Iconic Image,” another writer dismisses the term, musing whether *iconic* is “meaningless, overused, politically loaded...”<sup>4</sup> As these exasperated titles suggest, the authors assess the term as an attempt to shroud a product or an image with an aura of significance and timelessness. As the use *iconic* grows in frequency, its meaning diminishes, further deconstructed with each misuse. Yet, there are works in which the weight of the term remains intact.

In *Iconic: Images of the Floating World*, Ronin Gallery brings together such paragons of design. From Hokusai’s *Great Wave* to Kuniyoshi’s *Skeleton Specter*, this exhibition invites you to experience some of the most influential designs of ukiyo-e. Looking beyond the narrow frame of a single iconic image, this carefully curated selection expands the term to include groundbreaking techniques, perspectives, and formats that steered the woodblock medium. Whether large head portraits, erotica, landscapes, or birds and flowers, these images have come to define the spirit and culture of the floating world.

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3. Shaunacy Ferro, “Designers, Stop Calling Your Work ‘Iconic,’” *FastCompany.com*, July 9, 2018.

4. Stuart Franklin, “Why There’s No Such Thing as an Iconic Image,” *TheGuardian.com*, November 2, 2016.



## *Under the Wave off Kanagawa (aka The Great Wave)* Hokusai

No single work of Japanese art is more recognizable than Hokusai's *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, or, as it is widely known, *The Great Wave*. As the sea curls and crests overhead, fishing boats float far below, preparing for the impending crash of water. Even snow-tipped Mt. Fuji appears small beside the power of the sea. *The Great Wave* is an exceptionally modern work—the flat areas of color and precise blue outlines opened the hearts of Western Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Just as this work was popular among its contemporaries, *The Great Wave* continues to inspire audiences worldwide. The design has served as the centerpiece of many exhibitions of Japanese and East Asian art and sets record prices at auction.

Published as part of the series *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji* (1830-1832), today this design has become embedded in popular culture, appearing everywhere from phone cases to postage stamps. This 19th-century masterpiece presents the striking union of incomparable artistry and iconic design. Hokusai is not only among Japan's greatest ukiyo-e artists, but also an inimitable master in the history of art worldwide. His career stretched across nearly eight decades, yet his creativity never faltered. Hokusai's unerring sense of line, color, inventive composition, and emotional resonance is evident in *The Great Wave*.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, British Museum, Art Institute of Chicago, Tokyo National Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art, Edo Tokyo Museum, Library of Congress, and Harvard Art Museum.

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*

Date: c.1831-1832

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi

Signature: Hokusai Aratame Iitsu hitsu

Ref.#: JP5810







## *Fine Wind, Clear Weather (aka Red Fuji)*

Hokusai

While many of Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji* present a balance between the power of nature and the intimacies of human life, *Fine Wind, Clear Weather* is devoid of human life. This scene is a dedicated portrait of the series' namesake, powerfully rendered through striking simplicity. Mt. Fuji rises to the right corner of the image. The rust color that earns the print the name *Red Fuji*, is a fleeting one, occurring in the morning or at sunset, in the light of early summer, and only with a specific formation of clouds. Hokusai captures this moment with a flat plane of color. He intersects the mountain's sloping ascent with the abrupt *bokashi* of the tree line, a gradient achieved through wiping the ink on the block. Reduced to dots of green, the forest emphasizes the enormity of Mt. Fuji. Along with *Thunderstorm Beneath the Summit* and *Under the Wave Off Kanagawa*, *Fine Wind, Clear Weather* offers one of the most dramatic and well-known portraits of Japan's most famous mountain. Together, these three works have been called "a trio of masterpieces."

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, British Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art, Harvard Art Museum, and Ritsumeikan University.

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*

Date: c.1831-1832

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi

Signature: Hokusai aratame Iitsu hitsu

Ref.#: JP-111030







## *Thunderstorm Beneath the Summit (aka Fuji in Lightning)* Hokusai

From the placid peak in *Red Fuji*, *Thunderstorm Beneath the Summit (Fuji in Lightning)* presents a dramatic portrait of Japan's most famous mountain. The composition echoes *Red Fuji*, but the storm that roars below the peak shifts the viewer's perception of the mountain: jagged bolts of lightning crack across the bottom right edge of the image and a richly textured snowy peak emerges from the darkness. Unlike the flat plains of color found in *Red Fuji*, the mountain and the distant scenery gain a sense of solidity amidst the rolling thunder. Hokusai captures the calm above the clouds as the atmosphere below is lost in the darkness. Throughout the genre of *meisho-e*, or "famous place pictures," artists considered the beauty of place not as static, but instead ever changing with the season or weather. While each print in *Thirty-six Views* presents a new impression of Mt. Fuji, together *Thunderstorm Beneath the Summit* and *Fine Wind, Clear Weather* function as dedicated portraits of the mountain's range of beauty.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the British Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Honolulu Museum of Art, and the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*

Date: c.1831-1832

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi

Signature: Hokusai Aratame Iitsu hitsu

Ref.#: JP-111034







## *Tsukudajima in Musashi Province* Hokusai

Hokusai achieved great fame through his *meisho-e* (famous place pictures), namely the acclaimed *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (1826-1833). Incorporating one-point perspective and daring composition into his landscapes, Hokusai captured familiar locations with innovative technique—both in composition and in pigment. Built on reclaimed sandbanks in the 17th century, this quiet fishing village caught the eye of many artists during the Edo period. In the foreground, blue gradation creates a sense of depth, while the pink on the horizon suggests sunset. As the boats diminish into silhouettes, Hokusai draws the viewer's eye to the island village of Tsukuda. This particular impression belonged to the turn-of-the-century print collector Ernest LeVeel. His seal can be found on the back.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, British Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art, Ritsumeikan University, and Harvard Art Museum.

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*

Date: c.1831-1832

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi

Signature: Saki no Hokusai Iitsu hitsu

Provenance: Ernest LeVeel

Ref.#: JP-111020







## Distant View of Mt. Fuji as Seen from Senju Pleasure Quarter Hokusai

This view from *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji* takes its title from Senju, home to the private pleasure quarters located just outside Edo. Though the pleasure district extends into the image from the left edge of the print, Hokusai focuses on life just outside its walls. As blue clouds settle upon the field in the mid-ground, two female workers take a rest, watching the procession of samurai crossing the foreground. Matchlock rifles hoisted over their shoulders, they escort an unseen *daimyo*, or regional lord, and take in the view. While uniform in dress, Hokusai imbues each retainer with a sense of individualism through their facial expressions—some taking in the natural beauty of the distant Mt. Fuji, others perhaps daydreaming about the beauties just beyond the wall. Due to the popularity of this series, Hokusai created ten more views of Mt. Fuji. These encore designs, known as *ura-Fuji*, consider the back view of Mt. Fuji and are distinguished by the use of a black key block. This work is also notable for its subtle use of *bokashi* in the fields.

Other impressions can be found in the British Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Honolulu Museum of Art, and Harvard Art Museum.

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*

Date: c. 1833

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi

Signature: Saki no Hokusai Iitsu hitsu

Ref.#: JP-110064







## Roben Waterfall at Oyama in Sagami Province Hokusai

Roben Waterfall bursts from the cliffside, crashing into the pool below. In the spray of the falls, pilgrims purify themselves on the way to Oyama shrine. Hokusai's series *Views of Waterfalls in Various Provinces*, captures the spirit of each waterfall in strong vertical composition, balancing the power of nature and the nature of man. The human figures are small beneath the cascades, connecting these marvels of nature with the human rituals that surround them. In this print, Hokusai makes ample use of Prussian blue to lend depth to the falls, while capturing pilgrims in various stages of bathing. Considered one of Hokusai's monumental series, *Waterfalls* numbers only eight and it is thought to have taken over two years to complete.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, British Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art, Tokyo National Museum, Edo Tokyo Museum, Library of Congress, and Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Series: *Views of Waterfalls in Various Provinces*

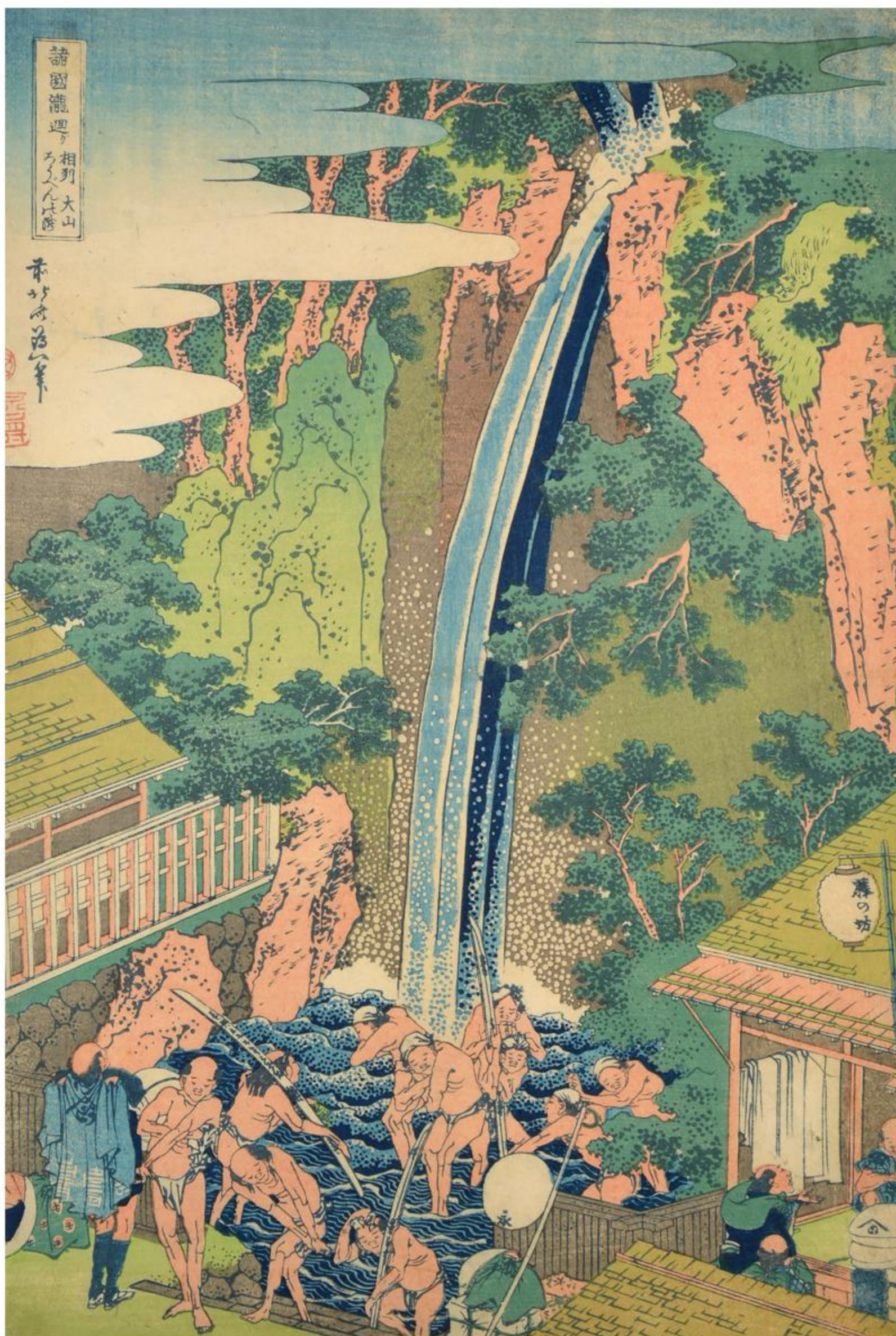
Date: c.1832

Publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi

Signature: Saki no Hokusai Iitsu hitsu

Ref.#: JP-101019







## *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife* Hokusai

Hokusai's *Dream of the Fisherman's Wife* is perhaps the most iconic work of *shunga*, or erotic imagery, from the floating world. The *ama*, or female diver, arches her neck, pleased by a pair of octopi. The smaller of the pair attends to her mouth, while the larger nestles between her legs, his tentacles enveloping her pale form. As her hands grasp the tentacles, the tale of their mutual enjoyment fills the background. It has been suggested that this design may have been inspired by the legend of Princess Tamatori—a shell diver who heroically retrieved a valuable pearl from a water dragon's underwater palace. The impact of this Edo period image has reverberated across the centuries. In the 20th century, Picasso painted his own interpretation of the scene, while this work is the forerunner to tentacle-related erotica today.

Another impression of this print can be found in the British Museum.

Series: *Kinoe no Komatsu (Young Pines)*

Date: 1814

Provenance: Kronhausen Collection

Ref.#: JP-111016







## Kabuki Actor Osagawa Tsuneyo II as Osan Sharaku

Face turned over his right shoulder, the actor Osagawa Tsuneyo II furrows his thick brows. Dressed in the role of Osan—an identification still hotly debated by scholars—the actor delicately grasps the green fabric of his outer kimono as it slides off his shoulder, revealing three encircled flowers. This crest identifies this famous *onnagata*, or male actor specializing in female roles. The bright peach of Osagawa's kimono is striking—typically, impressions of this shade fade to the palest hint of peach. Set against a dark grey mica, the actor's under kimono echoes its shimmer in pearl mica. Sharaku's oeuvre numbers approximately 140 works, mostly kabuki actors, marked by satire, unfaltering wit, and an interest in the individual. Sharaku and Utamaro are together credited with the rise of psychological portraiture in ukiyo-e: Sharaku in the realm of the theatrical, Utamaro in genre of beautiful women.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, British Museum, Harvard Art Museum, Tokyo National Museum, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and Ritsumeikan University.

Date: c.1794

Publisher: Tsutaya Juzaburo

Signature: Toshusai Sharaku ga

Ref.#: JP-111014







## Kabuki Actor Iwai Hanshiro IV as Shigenoi Sharaku

The rarity of Sharaku's work is amplified by the brevity of his career. Very little is known about Sharaku, though his work marks a major turning point in ukiyo-e portraiture. During his ten-month career, his prints were of such high caliber that critics and scholars compare him to Rembrandt. His work allows the viewer an intimate understanding of the subject, looking beyond the role to the actor behind it. This individualism can be seen in this portrait of *onnagata* Iwai Hanshiro IV in the role of the wet-nurse Shigenoi from the play *Koinyoubou Somewake Tazuna*. Lavishly printed with a dark mica ground, the distinctive nose, slim lips, and full cheeks of the actor reveal Sharaku's interest in the actors that entranced audiences on the kabuki stage. This design appeared on a Japanese international stamp in 1984.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, British Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art, and Ritsumeikan University.

Date: c.1794

Publisher: Tsutaya Juzaburo

Signature: Toshusai Sharaku ga

Ref.#: JPr-43932







## Three Modern Beauties: Okita, Toyohina and Ohisa Utamaro

Three famous beauties of the floating world combine to form one of Utamaro's finest and well-known compositions. In this *okubi-e*, Utamaro presents bust portraits of three of the famous beauties of the day. Each identifiable by a *mon*, or crest, these beauties dazzle against the shimmering mica ground. Though each women appear similar at first glance, Utamaro gives each her own identity. The famous courtesan Toyohina, the center figure, wears a primrose on her sleeve. On either side, renowned teahouse waitresses Okita (right) and Ohisa (left) can be identified by a paulownia on her fan and an oak leaf on her kimono, respectively. All three women appear in other designs by Utamaro. Slender and graceful, Utamaro's women bear small features and delicate color. During the 19th century, Utamaro's attention to beauty captured the attention of many Western artist. Definitively a masterpiece of ukiyo-e, this particular design was sought after by Louis Ledoux, one of the great collectors of ukiyo-e, for many years.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Ritsumeikan University and Harvard Art Museum.

Date: c.1792

Publisher: Tsutaya Juzaburo

Signature: Utamaro hitsu

Ref.#: JP-111038







## *The Courtesan Hitomoto of Monjiro* Utamaro

Wrapped in layers of peach and green, the courtesan Hitomoto leans back, exposing the pale nape of her neck. She grasps the pillow, her hair heavily laden with hairpins. Utamaro is one of the masters of ukiyo-e. Around 1791, he directed his focus to half portraits of individual beauties, breaking away from the group designs that dominated the *bijin-ga* (pictures of beautiful women) genre of the time. Through the intimate detail of the *okubi-e* (big head) format, Utamaro combines psychological portraiture with a subtle sense of eroticism—here found in the exposed nape of Hitomoto’s neck. Utamaro portrayed his age and its courtesans with such striking innovation that his women have become emblems of the floating world.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Ritsumeikan University.

Date: c.1798

Publisher: Yamaguchiya

Signature: Utamaro hitsu

Ref.#: JP-110878







## Beauty Holding a Fan Utamaro

Often Utamaro's women are nameless in print, but were readily recognizable beauties of their time. Often, these *kanban musume* or "poster beauties" create an atmosphere or capture a private moment. What is compelling about this particular work is the fluidity of the lines and simplicity of her form. As Utamaro's *okubi-e* (big head) portraits revolutionized the *bijin-ga* genre, the line with which he formed these elegant beauties inspired artists and collectors internationally. Utamaro demonstrates his mastery of line in this image of a young woman. The portrait is simple in color pallet, but rich in visual texture. Utamaro delineates her delicately undone peach kimono through no more than a few elegant strokes. As the line oscillates in width, Utamaro conveys the thickness of the fabric and the subtle curvature of the kimono's edge. The fine lines of her hair and nestled ornaments contrast the kimono.

Date: c.1797

Publisher: Yamaguchiya

Signature: Utamaro hitsu

Ref.#: JPr-43940







## *Courtesan Karakoto from Chojiya* Utamaro

Love letter in hand, the courtesan Karakoto turns her attention from the words of admiration to something just beyond the page. Through the strands of her hair, one can make out the pale curve of her ear. Her kimono is elaborately patterned, the outer layer presenting a design of birds soaring above waves. Utamaro built a reputation for capturing such private moments in the lives of these public figures. At the turn of the 19th century, Utamaro entered what Shibui has termed “The Period of Sentiments.” During this time, he designed portraits that penetrated the most intimate aspects of the personalities and private lives of all classes and types of women. Courtesans functioned as celebrities in the floating world. They were idealized in popular imagination and printed impressions.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Ritsumeikan University.

Date: c. 1802

Publisher: Moriya Jihei

Signature: Utamaro hitsu

Ref.#: JP-111028







*Courtesan Usumizu from Tsuruya*  
Utamaro

In this portrait, the courtesan Usumizu appears slightly undone—as she pulls the neck of her under kimono across her chest, fine wisps of hair can be found at the nape of her neck, her temple, and her left ear. Unlike the taut coiffures found in the other selected *okubi-e*, Usumizu's hair loosely rolls over her many hairpins in gentle waves. Utamaro pays such special care to her hair such that each strand seems tangible. She raises her eyebrows, her mouth slightly open, perhaps portrayed in a moment of surprise. The Yoshiwara captivated Utamaro throughout his career. In fact, his prints show such an intimate acquaintance with the women of the pleasure quarters, that he was called a “sensualist” by late 19th century Western critics.

Date: c.1789

Publisher: Yamaguchiya

Signature: Utamaro hitsu

Ref.#: JPI-51504







## *Yamauba and Kintaro* Utamaro

Utamaro's depictions of motherhood are considered some of his most intimate portraits. His representation of the relationship between mother and child went on to inspire artists a century later, such as the American impressionist Mary Cassatt. This print brings together both motherhood and one of Japan's most popular folktales. Kintaro is a famous Japanese hero known for his bright red skin and feats of incredible strength. Yamauba, the Mountain Woman, raised the orphaned Kintaro after his father abandoned him in the Ashigara Mountains. Though many images of the young hero focus on his strength or his animal playmates, Utamaro focuses on the relationship between mother and child. As Yamauba pulls the string taught around the child's hair, Kintaro makes a face at her in the hand mirror.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, and Tokyo National Museum.

Date: c.1795

Publisher: Tsutaya Juzaburo

Signature: Utamaro hitsu

Ref.#: JP-111040







## *Bullfinch and Scops Owl* Utamaro

Two bullfinches perch on a leafy branch, looking towards the owl resting on the wizened tree to the right. He nestles his tufted head down into his feathers, looking out at the viewer. In both species, Utamaro pays careful attention to the color and textures of the birds through details such as the subtle red *bokashi* coloring on the throat of the male bullfinch. The image bears two poems, each a pun around the pictured bird. The left poem reads, “Even *uso* (the bullfinch)/ sleeps in the night/ But your lies/ Give me no perch to rest.” *Uso* means bullfinch, but alludes to the Japanese word for “lie.” The right text reads, “I laugh/ And cry/ At the same time/ Since you ignore me/ Like an earless owl in the tree” (translation by the Metropolitan Museum of Art). Though the male bullfinch holds his mouth open, chirping towards the neighboring branch, the owl is nonplussed. This print belongs to Utamaro’s universally acclaimed *ehon* (illustrated book), *One Hundred Birds Compared to Humorous Ditties*. Both playful and intimate, this realistic and sensitively rendered design is a testament to Utamaro’s genius as an artist.

Other impressions of this work can be found in the Library of Congress, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Series: *Ehon Momo Chidori*

Date: c.1790

Publisher: Tsutaya Juzaburo

Ref.#: JP5459







## *Night View of Eight Scenic Places in Kanazawa* Hiroshige

Hiroshige completed his three masterpiece landscape triptychs in 1857, the final year of his life. Driven by an interest in the theme of “snow, moon, and flowers,” Hiroshige expanded his mastery of landscape across three sheets. This panoramic view of Kanazawa Bay is one of these stunning designs. With last blush of sunset lost beyond the mountains, the moon bathes the composition in evening light. A peninsula extends into the central panel, guiding the viewer into the bay to admire the full moon above. Under the blanket of night, the lush landscape of the bay becomes monochrome. Hiroshige evokes the texture of the trees and cliffs that roll down to the sea in shades of grey, yet the water is a still, flat blue—a mirror to the moonlight. Amidst this poetic expression of nature, the intimacies of human life carry on in miniature—figures cross the double-arched bridge in the right sheet and silhouettes occupy the boats out at sea.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Honolulu Museum of Art, British Museum, Ritsumeikan University, and Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Date: 1857

Publisher: Okazawaya Taheiji

Signature: Hiroshige hitsu

Ref.#: JP-110156









## *Sudden Shower at Ohashi Bridge and Atake* Hiroshige

As the black sky rains a shower of fine lines, several figures are caught in the sudden downpour. The two women brace their dark umbrellas against the wind as they run for the near bank of the Sumida River. Unprepared for the weather, a man pulls his straw cloak over his head, while three men huddle under a single umbrella on their way towards Atake, a red light district. In the river below, a small figure steers his boat to the shelter of Ohashi Bridge. Beneath the rain, the far bank is reduced to silhouettes, the temples of Fukagawa and Honjo just barely discernable. Hiroshige's work captured not only the natural beauty of Japan, but also the everyday life of its citizens. As intersecting diagonals and unexpected perspective create a stunning scene, the tangible unpreparedness of the human figures completes the atmosphere of a summer shower. In 1887, Van Gogh was so enamored with this design that he copied it in oil paint, sparking the international recognition of this image.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Honolulu Museum of Art, British Museum, Tokyo National Museum, Library of Congress, and Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Series: *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*

Date: 1857

Publisher: Uoya Eikichi

Signature: Hiroshige ga

Ref.#: JP-110148







## *Plum Garden at Kameido* Hiroshige

In one of the most recognizable designs of ukiyo-e, Hiroshige captures winter blooms through rich color and dynamic design. Between the blooming branches of the dramatically truncated plum tree in the foreground, the viewer looks into Edo's famous plum garden, Umeyashiki. Located on the banks of the Sumida River, the garden was home to the "resting dragon plum," whose low hanging branches gave the impression of a dragon flowing through the ground. While visitors admire the blooms from beyond the far fence, Hiroshige places the viewer amidst trees, close enough to admire the detail of the pale blossoms. The appeal of his tender, lyrical landscapes was not restricted to the Japanese audience. Hiroshige's work had a profound influence on the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists of Europe: Toulouse-Lautrec was fascinated with Hiroshige's daring compositions and inventive use of perspective, and Van Gogh literally copied this design in oil paint in 1887. Van Gogh's tracing and completed painting can be found at Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, British Museum, Tokyo National Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art, and Edo Tokyo Museum.

Series: *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*

Date: 1857

Publisher: Uoya Eikichi

Signature: Hiroshige ga

Ref.#: JP-111010







## Kanbara Hiroshige

The mountain village of Kanbara appears dark and chilly as the night quickly falls. Footprints dot the ankle-deep snow, only to be filled with fresh flakes. Hunched and heads bowed, travelers battle the wind. All is muffled in the final moments of dusk. Most scholars agree that Hiroshige passed through Kanbara during the summer. What's more, as part of modern Shimizu, this region is very temperate and even the smallest amount of snowfall is rare. In Hiroshige's five renditions of this station he presents not the Kanbara of his travels, but that of his imagination. The Hoeido depiction of this station is considered one of the masterpieces of the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*. In Hiroshige's own words, "Though there are many things that I have abbreviated, the composition is exactly like a true reflection of the scenery, so those who cannot travel can find some pleasure in them." In 1996, the band Weezer based their *Pinkerton* album cover on this design.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, British Museum, Library of Congress, Harvard Art Museum, Edo Tokyo Museum and Honolulu Museum of Art.

Series: *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*

Date: c.1832-1833

Publisher: Hoeido

Signature: Hiroshige ga

Ref.#: JPR-104062







## Shono Hiroshige

Though the smallest and least populous station on the Tokaido, Shono was immortalized through Hiroshige's rendition in the *Hoeido Tokaido*. Like *Kanbara*, *Shono* served Hiroshige less as an opportunity to capture observed reality and more as an opportunity for compositional exploration. The result is one of the most well-known designs of ukiyo-e. The viewer can feel the power of the wind as it bends each bough and understand the menacing darkness of the sky through shades of grey. The stormy scene bursts to life in the intersection of diagonals. As rain descends in heavy, insistent sheets, two travelers flee to the shelter of the town. Heads lowered, they braced their hats and umbrellas against the downpour. Four other travelers run ahead, straw cape pulled high on his shoulders, two porters carry a *kago* (palanquin). As the *kago*'s covering whips in the storm, one catches just a glimpse of the passenger within.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the British Museum.

Series: *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*

Date: c.1832 - 1833

Publisher: Hoeido

Signature: Hiroshige ga

Ref.#: JP-110876







## *Sea Off Satta in Suruga Province* Hiroshige

In this view of Mt. Fuji at Satta Pass, Hiroshige frames the dual nature of the sea through sloping diagonals. As the lines of the cresting wave, cliff side, and mountain slope intersect in the foreground, the eye is drawn into the chaos of crashing surf. In the distance, Hiroshige contrasts the power of the sea with a scene of tranquility: A sailboat floats upon the mirror-like surface. As the tendrils of the wave nearly brush the white sail, Hiroshige unites the composition, creating a portrait of the mercurial sea. Known as the “poet of landscape,” Hiroshige captured the beauty of nature with nuance and lyricism. With a tangible atmosphere and dynamic perspective, *Sea Off Satta in Suruga Province* showcases Hiroshige’s passion for the natural world.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and British Museum.

Series: *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*

Date: 1858

Publisher: Tsutaya Kichizo

Signature: Hiroshige ga

Ref.#: JP-111054





富士三十六景  
駿河薩多海上

洪鑑



## Kingfisher and Hydrangea Hiroshige

From the top of the composition the kingfisher appears to dive into the blooms of blue and white hydrangeas below. The bird will find no water at the base of these flowers, yet the poem lends a clue to the kingfisher's confusion. Written between flowers the haiku reads, "Hydrangeas/ They do not bloom in water/ Yet, seem to hold it." Blooming during *tsuyu*, or the rainy season in Japan, hydrangeas are associated with water. Hiroshige renders the blooms without an outline, echoing the sentiment expressed in the haiku. This work is considered a true masterwork of Hiroshige's *kacho-e*, or "bird and flower pictures." As he combines word and image, the work becomes a lyrical evocation of flora, fauna, and seasonal beauty. Like many of Hiroshige's *kacho-e*, this design was printed in multiple impressions by different publishers.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Honolulu Museum of Art. Poem translation from *Hokusai and Hiroshige: Great Japanese Prints from the James A. Michener Collection*.

Date: c.1832

Publisher: Sanoya Kihei

Signautre: Hiroshige hitsu

Ref.#: JP-110154







## *Takiyasha and Skeleton Specter in the Ruined Palace at Soma* Kuniyoshi

Epitomizing the fantastic quality that has come to define Kuniyoshi's work, this print is perhaps his best-known design. Following Taira no Masakado's failed attempt to seize control of Kyoto, his daughter Takiyasha remained in the dilapidated Soma Palace in Shimosa province, Chiba. Alone among the ruins, she became an accomplished sorceress. When the hero Mitsukuni is sent to destroy Takiyasha, it is he that meets his end. In Kuniyoshi's interpretation of this tale, Takiyasha stands beneath the broken lattice, summoning the massive skeleton specter from the darkness. Leaning over two sheets, the specter curls its claw-like fingers around the blinds, lowering its hollow face towards the ill-fated intruders. It is possible that Kuniyoshi drew inspiration for this strikingly large skeleton from anatomical models in Dutch drawing manuals.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the British Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Honolulu Museum of Art, and Waseda University Theatre Museum.

Date: c.1844

Publisher: Hachi

Signature: Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi ga

Ref.#: JP-121896









## Minamoto no Tametomo Rescued by Tengu Kuniyoshi

In one of his most iconic triptychs, Kuniyoshi draws from Bakin's novel *Chinsetsu Yumiharizuki* to depict Minamoto no Tametomo's supernatural rescue from a storm. Defeated in 1156 during the Hogen Rebellion, Tametomo was exiled to Izu. He soon escaped to Kyushu where he plotted the defeat of the Taira clan. As he sets sail to Kyoto to carry out his plan, a wild storm threatens his boat. In this fantastic print, Kuniyoshi conflates the three moments that lead to Tametomo's dramatic rescue. To the far right, Tametomo's wife drowns herself to quell the storm. After her sacrifice, Emperor Sutoku summons the *tengu* that descend from the left edge of the triptych to save Tametomo and their only son, Sutemaru. The infant is protected in the arms of Tametomo's faithful retainer Kiheiji, who rides on the back of a crocodile-shark (*wanizame*).

Other impressions of this print can be found in the British Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Chazen Museum of Art.

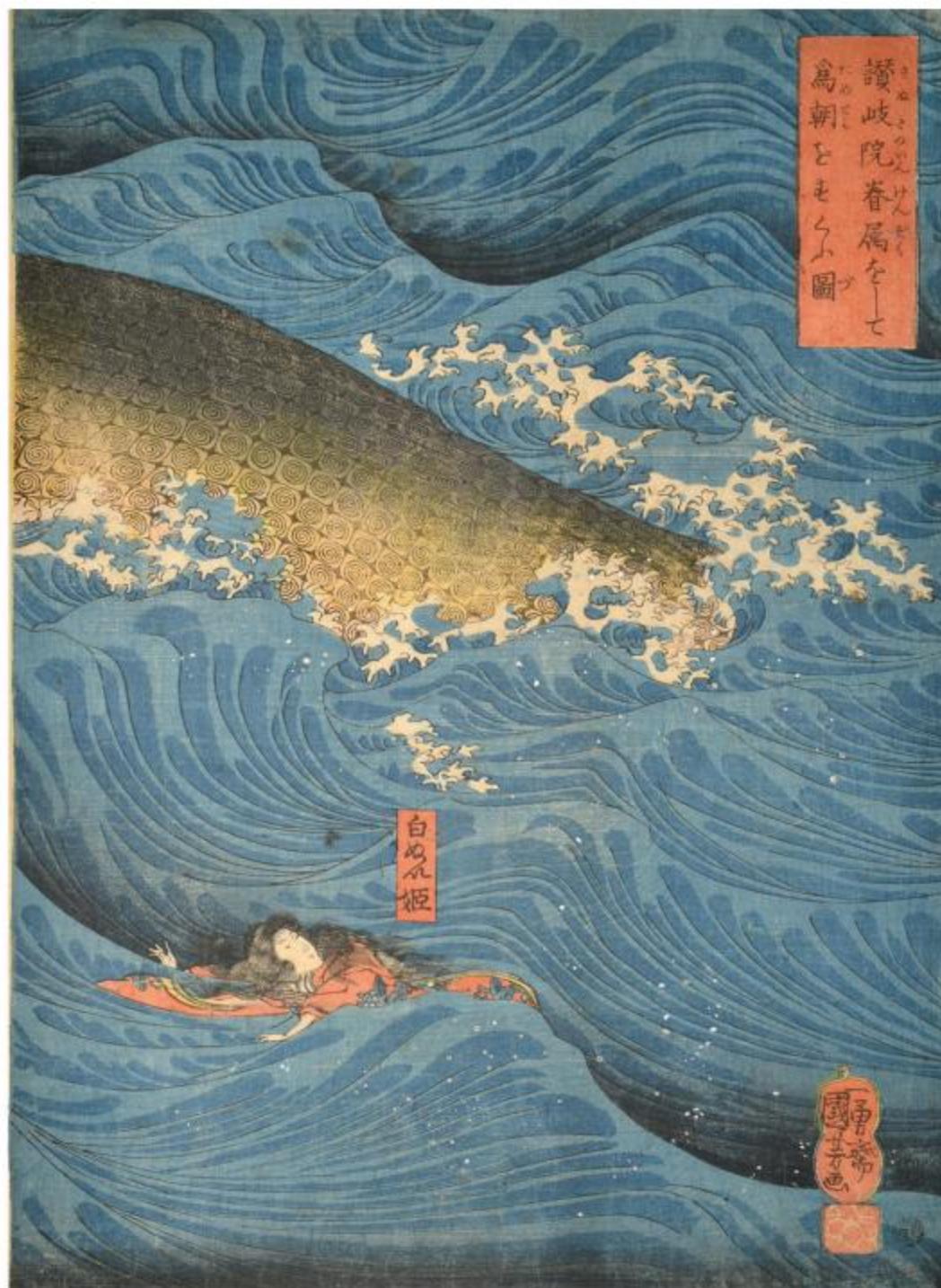
Date: c.1849

Signature: Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi ga

Ref.#: JP-111060









## Mase Magoshiro Masatatsu Kuniyoshi

Based on true events from the turn of the 18th century, the story of the forty-seven ronin has sparked prints, plays, books and contemporary film. The story goes as follows: The shogun appointed Asano Naganori, a young lord from the country, to receive the Emperor's ambassadors. The unscrupulous Kira Yoshinaka was assigned to teach Asano the ways of court etiquette, but insulted Asano so deeply that the country lord drew his sword in the palace. This offense mandated ritual suicide. Asano's forty-seven samurai retainers swore to avenge their master's death. After much planning, they staged a night attack, killing Kira before turning themselves in and meeting their own death. Their revenge marks an exemplary stand for the samurai code of *bushido*—a code of loyalty and honor. To this day, the forty-seven ronin remain enshrined at Sengaku Temple beside their beloved master. This design has served as the logo of Ronin Gallery for nearly 45 years.

Other impressions can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the British Museum, Edo Tokyo Museum, Waseda University Theatre Museum, and Tokyo Metro Library.

Series: *Biographies of the Loyal Retainers*

Date: c.1847

Publisher: Ebiya Rinnosuke

Signature: Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi ga

Ref.#: JPr-23186



# 誠忠義士傳

間勢孫四郎

正辰

孫四郎は久太夫正明の  
實子あり劍術手傳の  
達人也兼て刀脇差の柄ハ  
平打の木綿糸にて巻切柄の心持めて  
手の内能を專一必心係兼て手痛きをさるゝをあり  
討死の覚期ゆく暗き置一変あれば討入の  
時も初め半弓より矢種限り敵を射立  
應て弓を捨鎗を取て戦ひける座敷の奥にて  
鳥井初右衛門小出合山々と同山と名（けり）  
暗きされて眠るを知りて川と名（ね）合言  
葉ハ正一敵と思ひける鎗を取延突かす  
鳥井も透さず引く主人の身の上心  
りてある居間（行）んと思ひける汝小  
後を看せんも惜ひける手の上と扶あるを  
間勢正辰も望所と上段下段（を）  
盡し戦ひける小正辰過て雪より泉水へ  
轉ひ落けれ鳥井ハ得たりと刀を振あげ  
直向微塵と討係も既小斯よりと見へる處  
大星カ弥逸小星を見さるる退取てひきさ  
射る狙ひ違ひ鳥井ハ胸元射通せ六痛手小  
ひきさ孫四郎下より横切せらふ切先  
鳥井ハあむより乳の下まで切あられ  
せもあむ後居小倒きて死にけり孫四郎も  
躍り上り衣類の水を絞めあむ猶奥庭（切）けり



應雷  
一筆斎誌

一筆斎  
國十才画

金海老林

四上



## Mase Chudayu Masaaki Kuniyoshi

Kuniyoshi had a ravenous imagination and the full scope of his work reveals an aesthetic sensibility capable of capturing almost any experience. In this work from *Biographies of the Loyal Retainers*, Kuniyoshi puts the viewer in direct confrontation with the master archer Mase Chudayu Masaaki, making it a unique warrior portrait. Masaaki grounds his stance, toes gripping the stone as he aims his bow at the viewer. In the years of planning that preceded the famed night attack, Masaaki settled in Koushimachi and established himself as a physician. On the fateful December night of the attack, Masaaki was sixty-two years old. The text that surrounds his figures tells of his fearless battle skills with both sword and arrow, taking down younger men with ease.

Other impressions of this work can be found in the British Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Waseda University Theatre Museum, and Edo Tokyo Museum.

Series: *Biographies of the Loyal Retainers*

Date: c.1847

Publisher: Ebiya Rinnosuke

Signature: Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi ga

Ref.#: JPR-III064



# 誠忠義士傳

## 間瀬宙太夫正明

正明ハ三ッ橋浄定と愛名シテ格子町小借家あり一医師をのたま  
子息孫が郎小市郎と改名シ西國より鎮守再興勸化の支願主  
祐公小出なる者の由ニ義後三ッ人浄定方同居あり居り十二月十四  
討入ルルハ宙太夫行年六十二歳とのふも壯健なる血氣隆る者小  
少も劣る二番手小列シテ玄關より矢を係て切入り敵方森伴左門と  
渡り合双方猛威を争ひ勇を震つゝ血戦は原三村見を見て森の  
太刀先を多けれハ老人間瀬を討せし横合より討てりといふ  
勇氣熾然として宙太夫少も弱る手を爰構ふごと  
與つゝと呼りて猛虎の虎をさぐる鏝をより  
火をもち戦ひを譲るを下驛せりといふ  
討た太刀相ひ違ひ森の眉目針巻係て  
切らバ刀國後手練の達人真二ッを切割  
り森其儘叫びあは血煙立て死すけり  
宙太夫ハ手始りと血刀  
振て奥を目押馳入小守源次と  
名乗るけ太刀真向小立塞り戸口を  
入らんと支り面倒ありとあつせ  
上段下段と切結ふ小守も聞ゆる強勇  
あれども敵一かづやのかまんと師いんとせ  
所を横小拂ハ受損し右のわづの下より上へ  
二ッ切て捨さりハ寒小目覺しき老人の働きありと感いけり

應需 一筆萃誌



江戸町  
海老林  
四十四



## *Nichiren in Snow at Tsukahara on Sado Island* Kuniyoshi

Though the name Kuniyoshi may call to mind dynamic heroes, this scene from the life of Nichiren (1222-1282), the founder of the Hokke sect of Buddhism, is striking in its sense of stillness and meditative quality. From the series *The Life of Great Priest Nichiren*, this famous print portrays Nichiren during his wintry exile to Sado Island. At the base of Tsukahara Mountains, a small village hugs the shoreline, muffled beneath the snow. Bright against the winter landscape, Nichiren ascends into the mountains, ankle deep in fresh powder. As the wind sweeps across the composition, the priest reaches to secure his hat, instilling a sense of bitter cold in this solitary snow scene.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, British Museum, Honolulu Museum of Art, Harvard Art Museum, and Ritsumeikan University.

Series: *The Life of Great Priest Nichiren*

Date: c.1832

Publisher: Iseya Rihei

Signature: Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi hitsu

Ref.#: JPI-63472



高祖御一代略圖

△ 佐州塚原雪中



一  
國  
丹  
平  
印



## Warabi: Inuyama Dosetsu Kuniyoshi

In this mystical design, Kuniyoshi portrays the hero Inuyama Dosetsu from the epic *Tale of Eight Dogs (Hakkenden)*. Dressed as a wandering priest, Dosetsu makes “magic” as he sits unscathed in the middle of a raging fire. The flames seem to consume the design in its entirety, showcasing Kuniyoshi’s innovative approach to composition. The impact of the design is enhanced through the skill of the printer, apparent in the oxidation and coloring of the flames. With its furling flames and fluttering fabric, this design is one of the most dramatic prints of the *Kisokaido* series. Though this series takes its name from one Japan’s ancient highways, the landscape is reduced to a scalloped circle in the top left corner, secondary to the legend at hand.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the British Museum.

Series: *Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido*

Date: 1852

Publisher: Izutsuya Shokichi

Signature: Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi ga

Ref.#: JPR-84862





犬山  
道節

木曾街藏  
六十九次之内

三  
一勇齋  
國五万  
金井蘭屋



*Sumo Wrestlers Iwatoyama (Mt. Iwato) and Hiodoshi (Crimson Threat)*  
Kunisada

The two sumo wrestlers stand with knees bent, grounded in the ring, while their upper bodies entwine. Gripping *mawashi* (the belt) and shoulder, the figures appear still, yet the effort is expressed in their faces, written in pulled brows and the swinging tassels of their *mawashi*. While beauties of the Yoshiwara and stars of the kabuki theater took center stage in the floating world, sumo wrestlers were also central figures in Edo-period popular culture. Many of the great printmakers portrayed sumo in popular rivalries or in the form of *banzuke*, or ranking sheets. It is interesting to note in this particular impression, the enormity of the figures is communicated through a rippling of muscles that recalls earlier depictions of famous heroes.

Date: c.1830

Publisher: Moriya Jihei

Signature: Kochoro Kunisada ga

Ref.#: JP-111024







## *Fujiwara no Yasumasa Playing the Flute by Moonlight* Yoshitoshi

Fujiwara no Yasumasa (958-1036) was a renowned musician and poet in the Heian court. One autumn night Yasumasa made his way home through the isolated Ichiharano moor. He played his flute as he sauntered along. While he believed that he was alone amidst the tall grass, a bandit lay in wait. The highwayman, Hakamadare Yasusuke (also known as Kidomaru) planned to attack the lonely traveler and steal his elegant winter robes. Yet, as the music reached Yasusuke's ears, he found himself unable to attack. He became enchanted by the beauty of the music and followed Yasumasa all the way home. Upon reaching the courtier's home, the flutist noticed his unintended audience and offered Yasusuke a fine gift of clothing so that he would not leave empty-handed.

Yoshitoshi captures the moment of enchantment in his interpretation of this famous story. Yasumasa's sleeves ripple in the wind, his lips gently press to the flute, and his mind is entirely lost in his song. He seems unaware of the impending attacker crouched behind him. As Yasusuke curls his fingers around the handle of the sword, an act of violence seems imminent. This composition continues to enchant collectors worldwide.

Other impressions of this print can be found in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Ritsumeikan University and Waseda University Theatre Museum.

Date: 1883

Publisher: Akiyama Buemon

Signature: Taiso Yoshitoshi ga

Ref.#: JPR1-64997









## Yugao: The Chapter from the Tale of Genji Yoshitoshi

Murasaki Shikibu wrote the famed *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) at the beginning of the 11th century. The drama follows the romantic adventures of the irresistibly attractive Prince Genji. In this spirit, Yoshitoshi portrays the most mysterious of Genji's lovers. The story tells that Genji fell in love with her at the sight of her handwriting. Persist as he might, the beauty would not reveal her true identity, so he called her Yugao (evening glory), after the morning glory-like flowers that grew around her dilapidated house. One night, she agreed to accompany Genji to one of his lavish villas. After they consummated their love, Yugao died very suddenly, killed by a jealous spirit of a former mistress. Yoshitoshi portrays her as a wistful ghost, delicate and pale as the flower of her namesake. This work brings together two popular themes in ukiyo-e: the *Tale of Genji* and *yokai* (ghosts and strange apparitions).

Other impressions of this print can be found in the British Museum, and Waseda University Theatre Museum.

Series: *One Hundred Views of the Moon*

Date: 1886

Publisher: Akiyama Buemon

Signature: Yoshitoshi

Ref.#: JPR-104471



月百姿

源氏  
夕顔卷

芳子



刀本山

由屆明治十九年五月  
日 豐 月岡米次郎  
長秋武若三門





# Shunga

Literally translated as “spring pictures,” *shunga* is a genre of woodblock printmaking that depicts the entire gamut of sensual pleasures. Nearly all ukiyo-e artists produced *shunga* (though these works are often unsigned to avoid trouble with censorship laws). Released as single-sheet prints or *enpon* (book containing 12 pictures, usually progressing from the subtly suggestive to the strikingly explicit), *shunga* could be purchased from book vendors. The audience for these works spanned all classes and genders, generally promoting an attitude of *wago*, or “harmony between the sexes.” Given the ubiquity of communal baths at this time, nudity was not inherently sexual, so the couples in *shunga* are often portrayed fully clothed with only the exaggerated genitalia exposed. These emphatic depictions portray visceral, unconscious, and unbridled desire, while the clothing allows the artist to create wonderfully colorful prints. Furthermore, the clothing and hairstyles help to shape the narrative: who are these characters? How old are they? What is their role in society? The answer lies in the styling of the figures and other subtle symbolism.

*Shunga* could serve an educational or inspirational purpose, but the genre did not operate in the realm of reality. These prints promoted the realm of fantasy, serving as a source of titillation and entertainment. The enjoyment of *shunga* was lighthearted, but these prints held a special value. They served an amuletic purpose: promising good fortune to a bride on her wedding night, protecting the warrior from death, and warding off fire. Works of *shunga* were often passed down through generations, shared with dear friends, or presented as fine gifts to esteemed guests. The Tokugawa Shogunate presented Commodore Perry with elegant *shunga*, among other fine gifts, upon his arrival in 1853. American Journalist Francis Hall’s account of his welcome to a Japanese home reveals the special role of *shunga*: “He went to a drawer and brought something which he said was very valuable, and suiting the action to the end, placed in my hands three or four very obscene pictures. They had shown them as something really very choice and worth looking at and preserved them with great care (1859).”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Aki Ishigami, “Reception of *Shunga* in the Modern Era: From Meiji to the Pre-WWII Years” in *Japan Review* 26 (2013): 39.





*Under a Blossoming Cherry Tree*  
Utamaro

Series: *Utamakura*

Date: 1788

Publisher: Tsutaya Kichizo

Signature: Hiroshige ga

Ref.#: JPR5034





*Pleasure Seekers: Married Woman Asking Lover to Stop the Teasing*  
Utamaro

Series: *Negai no Itobuki*

Date: c.1799

Ref.#: JPR-96922





*Sheer Kimono: Celebrating a Passionate Meeting of Lovers*  
Utamaro

Date: c.1798  
Ref.#: JPR-96934





*Day and Night: Young Man and Married Woman Kissing  
(with enhancing supplement nearby)*

Hokusai

Date: c.1812

Ref.#: JPR-96936









*A Wild Embrace for Long Enjoyment*  
Hokusai

Date: c.1812

Ref.#: JPR-96940





## A Cat, Two Mice and Two Lovers Hokusai

Another impression of this print is illustrated in Kronhausen, *Erotic Art*, pl. 389.

Series: *Tsui no Hinagata (Models for Loving Couples)*

Date: c.1812

Ref.#: JPR-96944



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